

# **WATER QUALITY TEAM MEETING NOTES**

**November 14, 2000**

**National Marine Fisheries Service Offices  
Portland, Oregon**

## ***1. Introductions and Review of the Agenda.***

Mark Schneider of NMFS and Mary Lou Soscia of EPA, WQT co-chairs, welcomed everyone to the meeting, held November 14 at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting agenda and a list of attendees are Enclosures A and B. Please note that some of the enclosures referenced in these meeting notes may be too lengthy to routinely attach to the minutes; please contact Kathy Ceballos (503/230-5420) to obtain copies.

## ***2. SYSTDG Model Discussion.***

Schneider said the next significant item that needs to occur in the development of the SYSTDG model is the training workshop. Those agencies which participate in the workshop will then be able to work with the model and develop informed comments, which will then be submitted to Mike Schneider and BPA, which funded the model's development. Schneider said he will be collecting the names of entities and individuals who wish to participate in the training workshop; he asked anyone interested to provide him that information as soon as possible. Schneider added that there will likely be two training workshops, to encourage the largest possible number of participants. The workshops will be held some time in the month of January; only those who attend will be furnished a copy of the model.

## ***3. Corps of Engineers Annual Report.***

Ruth Abney reported that the minutes from the meeting at which the Corps' annual report was presented are now out for review, and will be posted to the Corps website as soon as they are finalized. At Schneider's request, Abney said the Corps will send copies of the minutes directly to the WQT membership. Abney also asked that the WQT let her or Dick Cassidy know if there is any additional information they would like to see included in the annual report.

## ***4. Fixed Monitoring Stations.***

Schneider reminded the group of the two site visits made to look at the fixed water quality monitoring stations in the Columbia and Snake Rivers earlier this year; the purpose of those visits was, in part, to see whether the stations are in fact providing the information needed to support water quality decision-making in the region, and to support a systemwide dissolved gas model. He noted that he had taken numerous photos during these field trips, which may be of interest to the group; he then went briefly through them, pointing out some of the problems and discrepancies encountered. Among other things, he noted that there was some variation in the depth at which some of the monitors are currently placed; the

Corps' Walla Walla District has agreed to correct that problem prior to the 2001 in-season management period. Schneider said he will be working with other site visit participants, such as Joe Carroll of the Corps, to develop a matrix summarizing the physical placement and other characteristics of the monitors above and below all of the projects in the system, as a starting-point for the discussion of what may need to be changed or improved.

#### ***5. Mainstem TMDLs and the Columbia River Basin Tribal Water Quality Conference.***

Soscia said EPA is about to sign an agreement with Oregon, Washington and Idaho on the mainstem TMDL; the main point of that agreement is that EPA will be taking the lead on the temperature portion of the TMDL and the states will take the lead on the dissolved gas portion of the TMDL. The geographic boundaries of the TMDL will be from the Astoria Bridge to the International Boundary at Lake Roosevelt to the Clearwater River on the Lower Snake. On the tribal lands covered within these geographic boundaries, EPA will be taking the lead on the dissolved gas portion of the TMDLs, Soscia said. Rick Parkin of EPA's Seattle office will be heading up the TMDL project. Soscia added that on Tuesday, November 28, EPA will be holding a workshop in Portland to share information about the TMDL process; this meeting will be held here at the NMFS offices.

It is extremely important to EPA that the tribes be involved in the development of the mainstem TMDL, Soscia said; there have been a number of meetings between EPA, the states and the tribes over the past several months. A major water quality conference, focused primarily on tribal involvement in the TMDL process, is scheduled later this week in Spokane, she said. Soscia added that there has been some discussion of holding another TMDL workshop in Portland some time in the next few weeks to involve the PUDs.

Soscia said she will provide copies of the TMDL agreement to the WQT as soon as it is signed. In response to a question, she said EPA's goal is to complete the mainstem TMDL by December 31, 2001.

#### ***6. Update on EPA Water Temperature Model.***

Soscia reminded the group that, eight months ago, EPA agreed to produce a more user-friendly version of its temperature model; the final report is now complete, and a CD-ROM version of the temperature model is available. Soscia said she will email the WQT details of how to access both the report and the CD-ROM within the next week or two.

#### ***7. 2000 Biological Opinion – Next Steps.***

Soscia reminded the WQT that EPA has been working, within the negotiations on the 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion, to ensure that the Clean Water Act is adequately addressed in the BiOp. In EPA's opinion, it is impossible to lay out a plan to recover the listed species without talking about water quality, said Soscia; therefore, it is imperative that the processes needed to improve water quality in the Columbia River Basin are integrated into the ESA decision process. To that end, a Water Quality Plan

has been developed by the federal agencies, laying out a strategy for moving toward Clean Water Act compliance in the Snake and Columbia River mainstems, Soscia said. That Water Quality Plan is attached as Appendix D to the 2000 BiOp; EPA is in the process of clarifying, with the other federal agencies, what elements of that Water Quality Plan are Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives under the Clean Water Act, what elements are conservation measures, and what elements simply describe a commitment to work toward improving water quality as a part of recovery.

The crucial next step, of course, is the implementation of those water quality measures, Soscia said. There will be many decisions that have to be made over the next few years regarding those water quality measures, she said; as most of you are aware, it is envisioned that the Water Quality Team will evolve from a technical advisory group to a decision-making group that will work with the Implementation Team to make those water quality decisions. How exactly this will occur is still under discussion, said Soscia; it may make sense for the WQT to schedule a separate meeting to address this issue.

Soscia added that it is EPA's hope that it will be possible to mesh the BiOp Water Quality Plan with the TMDL development process, rather than proceeding on two separate tracks. This will require full engagement of the federal action agencies, the states and the tribes in the TMDL process, she said – that way, everyone has a stake in the outcome.

The group discussed the challenges associated with full integration of Clean Water Act and TMDL implementation with the ESA/Biological Opinion processes, in particular, the fact that no separate funding source has been identified for CWA projects, as well as the fact that there may be institutional resistance, within some agencies, to the idea that a CWA violation equates to an ESA violation. The group also devoted considerable discussion to the future role and structure of the Water Quality Team, focusing, among other issues, on how the WQT, SCT and TMT might share decision-making responsibilities.

Ultimately, it was agreed to devote the majority of the WQT's December 12 meeting to an in-depth discussion of the future role of the Water Quality Team. It was further agreed that it may be helpful to invite some IT members to participate in that discussion. Schneider said he will distribute a list of discussion questions to the WQT participants prior to the group's December meeting.

#### ***8. Next WQT Meeting Date.***

The next meeting of the Water Quality Team was set for Tuesday, December 5, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at NMFS' Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.